

Masthead Logo

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Getty

Richard Hugo

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His grave is modern. His anguish goes back—  
the first tone from struck rock. You and I,  
we're civilized. We can't weep when it's needed or counts.  
If you die first, I'll die slow as Big Bear,  
my pale days thin with age,  
night after night, the stars callow as children.

## Getty / Richard Hugo

Today, I remembered Getty, the old man  
at Price's lake who rented boats and coughed  
and told me he was gone. Moss caked his lungs  
and a sky I'd forgotten drifted in his eyes.  
The brooks I caught were dazzling and wild.  
I shouted 'Lord love Getty' at the trees.  
Nothing came back. The young sheen of willows  
hung over cedars dark and grumpy with age.

I came back early next spring but Getty  
prophetically blue, had gone, that winter  
I stayed home in Seattle and wrote hard  
to make 'alive' and 'violent' do for the sky.

Some days the fish don't bite. You know that.  
And we die at wrong times, like friday.  
Whatever day Getty died, it could not be special  
or wrong, an old man like him, alone  
with a lake, no urge to go after trout  
and no particular feeling when nylon  
arcs out over the water, hangs that one moment  
all moments pulse, first kiss, first soft light  
in the eyes of the girl who seemed nothing last week,  
and settles soft as a far teal  
and waits.

Let's see. What happened today: a mild fight  
in the tenure meeting. We voted nine to one 'no.'

A disturbed student raged in my office  
about elk roaming some desert for water.  
A swim—I felt my arms harden  
and knew I was building more wind.  
On the way home, night ignited the town  
and I thought of a speech: In conclusion,  
let me say Getty let me say—  
I remembered his eyes and the sky in them,  
his easy prediction coughed out  
like we had plenty in common.

## Alma / Kathryn Stripling

Two dead leaves  
on the table and ice

floats on milk like the ashes  
of leaves. Oak  
twigs kindle  
and fire leaps like a prayer, “Give us

breath.” When I open  
the door and breathe deeply  
the cold air inflames me.  
The fire seizes log after log.

In the garden my husband burns  
dead stalks of squash and potatoes.  
I sweep my dust into the coals  
and our smoke mingles over the orchard.

In winter I sweep the floor gladly.  
I gather the crumbs from the cupboard,  
and the rinds of the apples.  
When the dust bin grows heavy,  
I give what it holds to the fire  
and the fire sings its song: